



# COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

April 27, 2004

Contact: Clay Clifton (619) 338-2386

Mark McPherson (619) 338-2201

Medical Information: Community Epidemiology (619) 515-6620

## **ANNUAL QUARANTINE DECLARED ON SPORT-HARVESTED MUSSELS** ***During Warmer Summer Months, Certain Shellfish Can Be Poisonous***

The California Department of Health Services (DHS) has declared its annual quarantine on sport-harvested mussels for human consumption. The quarantine, which is in effect from April 23 to Oct. 31 along the entire California coast, is issued to prevent paralytic shellfish poisoning (PSP) and domoic acid poisoning due to marine biotoxins that accumulate in these shellfish. The quarantine applies only to sport-harvested mussels; however, consumers of sport-harvested clams or scallops are advised to only eat the white meat and discard the viscera before cooking.

Shellfish harvested by state-certified shellfish growers and sold commercially in markets should pose no risk of poisoning to consumers.

"Certain shellfish may be poisonous during warmer months, since they eat a single-celled organism, *Alexandrium catenella*, that can multiply rapidly in warmer water," said Gary Erbeck, director of the San Diego County Department of Environmental Health.

If these shellfish are eaten during the quarantine they may contain a toxin that can affect the nervous system of humans within a few minutes to a few hours. Symptoms include tingling around the mouth and fingertips. In cases of severe poisoning, death may occur. There is no known antidote; however, appropriate medical care has been proven effective in managing the symptoms of PSP and should be sought immediately if one suspects PSP. "Poisonous mussels look the same as harmless ones. The toxin is heat stable and cannot be destroyed by cooking," said Erbeck.

Environmental Health coordinates a year-round shellfish sampling and testing program.

Updated information about shellfish toxin findings and quarantines can be obtained by calling the county Shellfish Information line at (510) 540-2605 or (800) 553-4133.

###